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An Alternative Voice Never Stilled

For 54 years, this newspaper column has sought to provide Americans with an alternative to the official version of events, to champion the cause of the voiceless instead of the dominant and the helpless against their exploiters, to uphold the public's right to know and control rather than the official's prerogative to conspire and conceal.

These goals were passed on to me by the late Drew Pearson, a fighter with a Quaker conscience, cantankerous in print but gentle in person, who founded the column in 1931. He viewed Washington as a nest of submerged causes to chronicle, organized frauds to expose, political pretenses to unmask and diplomatic intrigues to dissect.

Drew had a dream that the column he developed would become a bulwark that would survive his death, a voice that would never be stilled. With this in mind, he made me a partner and shared the byline with me.

This is an appropriate time for me, in the Drew Pearson tradition, to choose partners, to groom them as I was groomed and to extend the life of the column for another generation. All my associates are qualified; the shame is that there isn't room for all their names on the byline. So from my staff of investigative reporters, I have selected Dale Van Atta and Joseph Spear who, hereafter, will share the byline with me. Of course, I will remain in charge.

Van Atta has the imagination and boldness eventually to take over the leadership of the column. He also has a gift for digging out facts that

are seemingly inaccessible. Van Atta has tracked stories across all seven continents; he has been nominated five times for journalism's top award, the Pulitzer prize.

He did the reporting for me that focused the first national spotlight on Central Intelligence Agency renegade Edwin Wilson. The columns brought a warning that, in retaliation, a self-confessed assassin planned to kill Van Atta. I exposed the murder plot, and the next day the man skipped the country.

Van Atta's ability to dig out embarrassing secrets has made him an irritant to the CIA, which keeps an active file on him. The FBI also has an ongoing investigation to seek his sources.

Spear, who for nearly a decade has been my editor, has the toughness and courage to act on his better impulses in the worst weather. He has been a crusader who, among other stories, uncovered the FBI surveillance of American celebrities.

Last year, Spear published a book, "Presidents and the Press: The Nixon Legacy," which was a labor of love. Here's how he explained it in the preface:

"I love the First Amendment and all it stands for Ours is a government of the people. We are the sovereigns; those who work in government are our servants. We have a right to know what they are doing"

"Journalists worry too much about their popularity; it is inherently a lost cause. They should simply report the news and raise hell—as fairly, accurately and responsibly as they can It is nice but not necessary to be liked."